

# On the interaction of gender class shift and declension class shift: Evidence from early Germanic inflection

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Gender was one of the factors involved in the analogical reorganisation of nominal inflections in older Germanic languages, but rather than affecting the dynamics of the process, it served as a force guiding the direction of analogical shifts of nouns between declensional classes. Even the earliest attested analogical shifts tended to occur in compliance with gender, with the masculine and neuter stems following the inflectional pattern of the largest masculine and neuter class, the *a*-stems, and the feminine stems following the most numerous feminine class, the *ō*-stems. This tendency, which can be referred to as *gender conservation principle* (Keyser & O'Neil 1985), implies that the extension of analogical inflections proceeds in line with the inherited gender, or, in other words, that gender class affiliation of nouns does not change alongside the change of the declension class.

The present paper investigates the interaction between analogical declension class shift and gender class shift in three closely related early Germanic languages: Old English, Old Frisian and Old Saxon. The available corpus data indicate that this consistency in the preservation of gender class affiliation was to some extent distorted, and some traces of unhistorical gender assignment, and thus gender class shift appearing alongside the declensional class shift, did occur. This tendency can be found across various minor (unproductive) paradigms and it occurs on the lemma- rather than declension class-level. Some patterns observable in the material include the presence of the masculine marker *-es* (*-is*) in the feminine paradigms, especially in the root nouns in Old English and Old Saxon, or the fluctuation of gender in certain nouns between feminine and masculine inflection (e.g. OFris. *kere* 'statute'), and feminine and neuter inflection (e.g. *book* in all examined languages). The extension of these analogical markers, however, does not always involve a systematic change of gender class affiliation, but often some unsystematic fluctuations in the paradigm.

The aim of the paper is to examine these gender and declension class mismatches, taking into account the congruential gender criteria (i.e. the relationship between the pre- and post-head modifiers, and the head word of the nominal group), and to identify the factors that conditioned the shift of gender alongside the declensional shift. The study indicates that factors such as syllable structure and semantics, among others, play a significant role in conditioning the change of gender class affiliation alongside that of declension class.

Additionally, different chronology of changes in the gender systems of individual languages turns out to be the factor responsible for the divergent pattern of spread of some inflectional markers across West Germanic. As long as gender distinction was preserved, interdeclensional transitions occurred within gender classes. Towards the end of the Old English period, when the first traces of dissolution of the gender system are visible (e.g. Jones 1988; Curzan 2003; Millar 2002), this consistency of transfers within gender class declined. In contrast, in Old Saxon, gender was a stable feature, well retained into the Middle Low German period and later, and thus remained the factor controlling the directions of shifts for much longer.

## References

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